



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Adults Urged to Get a Flu Vaccination

Salt Lake City, UT – According to a recent Rand Corporation survey, by mid-November 2008, only three in ten adults aged 18 years and older had been vaccinated against influenza. Only one in five adults said they intended to receive the vaccine during the remainder of the season. The survey also revealed that health care workers, caregivers and those with asthma lag behind other groups for getting vaccinated.

This survey is a first of its kind that shows mid-season data for influenza vaccination use by U.S. adults. Vaccination rates were comparable among all sections of the country, ranging from 28 percent in the West to 32 percent in the Northeast. The primary reason mentioned for not getting vaccinated was lack of a perceived need, while 40 percent of those surveyed who still plan to get vaccinated cited a lack of time as a reason for delaying it.

“This information is disturbing, but we can use it to identify strategies for improving vaccination coverage,” says Robert Rolfs, MD, State Epidemiologist. “We know people are less likely to get vaccinated after the holidays, so we must do a better job of educating people about the seriousness of influenza and the value of vaccine for preventing it.”

Public health officials say the influenza season so far has been fairly mild with only 16 reported cases of influenza-associated hospitalizations, but that is no prediction for the rest of the season. “The holiday season brings large crowd settings and close living conditions that make it easy for the influenza virus to spread. Vaccination is one of the best defenses against getting sick,” adds Rolfs.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and the Utah Adult Immunization Coalition (UAIC) say there is still plenty of influenza vaccine available and encourage all persons to consider vaccination; especially those at high risk for serious complications. It takes about two weeks after vaccination to develop protection.

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Vaccination should continue throughout the influenza season, from October until May. Typically, influenza vaccination falls off after Thanksgiving, but the virus doesn't tend to peak until January or February. Vaccination after the holidays still provides protection for those peak periods.

This year's influenza vaccine contains three new virus strains (*A/Brisbane/59/2007 (H1N1)-like*, *A/Brisbane/10/2007 (H3N2)-like*, and *B/Florida/4/2006-like*). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is a good match between the vaccine and the most common influenza viruses that are circulating.

Influenza is a *very* contagious viral infection of the respiratory system. Every year in the U.S., on average, five to 20 percent of the population gets influenza; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications, and about 36,000 people die from influenza. Symptoms of influenza include fever, muscle aches, headache, congestion, runny nose, cough, sore throat, and general weakness. These symptoms usually appear one to three days after a person has been exposed to the virus. The influenza virus is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and sprays droplets that can be inhaled by others. Complications such as pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections can occur. Influenza can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have influenza, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by influenza.

If you think you have influenza, contact your physician within 24 hours. Although the influenza vaccine is the best way to prevent influenza, prescription antiviral drugs, if taken early on, can help reduce the severity and duration of illness. If you get influenza, you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and take medication to relieve the symptoms. You should also stay home from work and other activities to prevent spreading the virus to others.

For more information on influenza or where to find the vaccine, call your health care provider, public health department, or the Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659. An influenza clinic locator is also available at www.immunize-utah.org.

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